Chapter 9
Exploring the Ebers Calendar

The previous chapters listed evidence of feasts apparently held out of their eponymous months in the Greco–Roman calendar, discussed by Gardiner in 1906 and 1955, and by recent scholars. We now review the opinions held by scholars since the 1980s on how to interpret the Ebers calendar and the conundrum of the out-of-place feasts.

The two topics are intrinsically related because the first column of the Ebers calendar (Table 9.1) is a prime example of a calendar that begins with wp rnpt and not tḫy. In the Ebers calendar, the various feasts all appear in their eponymous months. An understanding of the Ebers calendar can resolve the problem of why some feasts are out of their eponymous months in the Greco–Roman calendar.

Table 9.1: The Ebers Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 9 under the majesty of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt Dsr-k3-R 5 may he live forever</th>
<th>wp rnpt</th>
<th>III šmw</th>
<th>day9</th>
<th>going up of Sothis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wp rnpt</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tḫy</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mnhḫt</td>
<td>I 3ḥt</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hwṭ ḫr</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k3 ḫr k3</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>šf bdt</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṣḥ ḫr</td>
<td>I ḫt</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṣkh ḫr</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṣrnwtt</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫnsw</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫnt ḫt</td>
<td>I šmw</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫpt ḫmt</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>day9</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*= ditto.

Problems Associated with the Ebers Calendar

Scholars recognize that the first column of the Ebers calendar with its 12 month-names corresponds in some way with the civil calendar of the second column shown by its seasonal designations. The first column starts with the month of wp rnpt, which means “the opener,” but this month is reckoned by almost all scholars to be the 12th month. In what way then does wp rnpt in the Ebers calendar correspond with the second column of civil month designations? It begins with III šmw, the 11th month in the Greco–Roman calendar, and adjacent to “day9” in the third column. This date, III šmw 9, is the date for the “going up of Sothis” in the fourth column.
How can scholars justify *wp rpnt* as a 12th lunar month or a 12th civil month?

Furthermore, those who attribute the first column to a lunar calendar have a problem in correlating it with the civil calendar because the repetition of “day 9” in the third column for all 12 months suggests that each month consists of 30 days, not 29 or 30 as in a lunar calendar.¹

Scholars also point out that the five epagomenals (at the end of the year) are omitted, so that the year has only 360 days, but after the 12th month “day 9” should advance to day 14. Furthermore, the ditto marks under the “going up of Sothis” in the fourth column for all 12 months seem to suggest a monthly rising of Sothis on day 9 of every month. But the “going up of Sothis” is an annual event.

These are some of the problems associated with understanding the Ebers calendar. Now, what answers have scholars proposed?

Many Egyptologists support Parker’s theory of lunar calendars and have applied his original lunar calendar to the first column of the Ebers calendar.² Others, such as Winfried Barta in 1983, followed by Jürgen von Beckerath in 1993, have applied the first column to Parker’s later lunar calendar.³

However, there are other Egyptologists who regard the first column of the Ebers calendar as a civil calendar, such as Christian Leitz, Ulrich Luft, Marshall Clagett, and Anthony Spalinger.

Gardiner’s novel idea of two civil calendars has lacked general scholarly support because it is not understood how feasts could “shift” from one month back to the previous month.

**Scholars Views on the Ebers Calendar**

In 1983, Wolfgang Helck suggested that the Ebers calendar date of III  addAction 9 was not a specific Sothic date, but that Sothis rose sometime between III addAction 9 and IV addAction 8.⁴ Subsequently, in 1986, Franz-Jürgen Schmitz, recommended what was previously suggested by Donald B. Redford in 1966,⁵ namely, that two feasts that fell in the reign of Amenhotep I, on III addAction 11 and 13 mentioned on a Turin papyrus and a British Museum ostracon, respectively, should be applied to the accession feast of Amenhotep I lasting several days.⁶ Schmitz then proposed that the feast lasted five days beginning on III addAction 9, Amenhotep I’s alleged accession day, which coincided both with the rising of Sothis in his ninth regnal year and the day of a new moon.⁷ The idea that “day 9” was the first day of a regnal year and that each regnal month began on day nine of the civil year was

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¹ See depictions in chap.3, pp 50-51, Figures 3.1 and 3.2 and discussion.
⁷ Schmitz, Amenophis I, 29.
accepted by various scholars, such as Rolf Krauss in 1986, and Ulrich Luft also in 1986, and reiterated by the latter in 1989.

**Jürgen von Beckerath**

However, in 1987, Jürgen von Beckerath rejected the view held by Helck and Luft that the Ebers calendar did not contain a Sothic date, and the idea of Schmitz and Luft that a regnal year was portrayed by “day 9,” because he found no evidence for a regnal calendar. Instead, Von Beckerath proposed that the first column of Ebers represented *feasts of lunar months*; the lunar month of *wp rnpt* being equated with the third *šmw* month of the civil calendar, and day nine being the rising of Sothis. Helck responded in 1988 to von Beckerath’s rejection of his and Luft’s view that the Ebers calendar did not have a Sothic date, by trying to reconstruct the chronology of the 18th Dynasty from the known regnal years of its kings and alleged dates, and whether or not a Sothic date of III *šmw* 9 could be proven for Amenhotep I’s ninth year. On his dates he found it was not possible! He reiterated III *šmw* 9 as the accession day of the king.

**Wolfgang Helck**

In 1989, Helck followed Parker’s proposal that the rising of Sothis had to happen in the first *lunar* month and that it was not connected to a specific date. Thus Helck suggested that Sothis rose heliacally sometime in the month III *šmw* 9 and IV *šmw* 8. He asserted, “We are not allowed to use this entry for chronological calculations.”

**Winfried Barta**

Winfried Barta, in his article of 1988, understood the first column of the Ebers calendar to represent a lunar calendar with *wp rnpt* being the last month and the date of III *šmw* 9 being the ninth lunar day, and the day of Amenhotep I’s accession, rather than the day of the heliacal rising of Sothis. He reasoned that the “day9” refers to the beginning of each regnal year since it cannot refer to the annual heliacal rising of Sothis, which he thinks may have occurred any time between III *šmw* 9 and IV *šmw* 8 of the civil year.

**Christian Leitz**

In 1989, three years after Luft’s 1986 article, Leitz proposed a different interpretation of the Ebers calendar. He noted that *wp rnpt* was in the 12th month

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11. Ibid., 29-30.
12. Ibid., 28-29.
16. Ibid., 7-8.
17. Ibid., 8-11.
position in the Cairo Papyrus 86637 where it had the highest number of daylight hours, indicating the summer solstice month; whereas, in the Ebers calendar, \textit{wp \textit{rnpt}} was in first month position.\textsuperscript{19} He was not convinced that the first column of Ebers was a schematic lunar calendar having 30 days to each month with \textit{wp \textit{rnpt}} as its last month. He considered Gardiner’s rejection of a lunar calendar valid.\textsuperscript{20} He proposed two calendars: a solar one in the first column with the month of \textit{wp \textit{rnpt}} identical to the month of III \textit{šmw}, with the summer solstice falling on III \textit{šmw} 1,\textsuperscript{21} and another calendar in the second column starting with the “going up of Sothis” on III \textit{šmw} 9 where it had shifted eight days in relation to the solar year.

The dots under the “going up of Sothis” in the third column indicated the beginning of each successive month starting on the ninth day.\textsuperscript{22} He particularly disagreed with the idea that the Ebers calendar represented regnal years in its second and third columns with the assumed accession of Amenhotep I on III \textit{šmw} 9.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Anthony Spalinger}

In 1989/1990, Anthony Spalinger rejected Parker’s view that the first column in Ebers was a list of lunar months, proposing instead that they were the names of civil months, whose numerical designations appear in the second column beginning with III \textit{šmw} 9. He recognized III \textit{šmw} 9 either as the date of \textit{prt \textit{Spdt}} beginning a new civil year,\textsuperscript{24} or the accession date of Amenophis I (Amenhotep I).\textsuperscript{25} However, he viewed \textit{wp \textit{rnpt}} at the head of the first column as the 12th month of the civil year. He gives two explanations for this “odd” order.\textsuperscript{26}

(1) \textit{Wp \textit{rnpt}} can be seen as the feast day for the rising of Sothis on III \textit{šmw} 9 equated with I \textit{3ḥt} 1, which leaves the remaining months in the order of 1 through 12.

(2) \textit{Wp \textit{rnpt}} is 12th month at the head of the first column, followed by \textit{tḥy} as month 1, \textit{mnḫt} month 2, and so on; this arrangement being described as idealized and schematic, but linked with the \textit{real civil date} of III \textit{šmw} 9.\textsuperscript{27}

The repetition of “day9” in the third column, referring to day nine of the going up of Sothis, shows that each month had 30 days, illustrating the schematic nature of the calendar,\textsuperscript{28} which is also shown by the omission of the epagomenal days.\textsuperscript{29}

Gardiner’s evidence for feasts held in the month after their eponymous month is explained as “the transference of month-names from the older [lunar] calendar to the newer [civil] one,”\textsuperscript{30} thus Spalinger recognizes an original lunar calendar—but not in the first column of Ebers.

In 1992, in the context of asserting that the equation of \textit{wp \textit{rnpt}} as the first day of the civil year with \textit{prt \textit{Spdt}} is rare until the Late Period, Spalinger wrote, “Ebers, with its remarkable month orientation, offers more problems than solutions and I prefer to follow

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 24.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid., 25, 28, 34.
\item Ibid., 28.
\item Ibid., 31-34.
\item Ibid., 141.
\item See lists in “Return to Papyrus Ebers,” 143; idem, “A Chronological Analysis of the Feast of \textit{tḥy},” \textit{SAK} 20 (1993) 293.
\item Ibid., “Return to Papyrus Ebers,” 140.
\item Ibid., 142.
\item Ibid., 140-42.
\item Ibid., 143.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the present scholarly interpretations by considering it to be more of an intellectual product than a true source for chronology.”

**Ulrich Luft**

In 1992, Luft registered strong doubts concerning the existence of a lunar calendar. He writes:

The weak position of the lunar calendar in general lessens the possibility of explaining the month-names of the Ebers calendar as lunar ones … The so-called lunar month-names known since the Middle Kingdom are only alleged lunar ones with the exception of the Dressing of the God’s Statue (mnh.t) that was moving in the second lunar cycle after the beginning of the Civil Year. In the Illahun archives the Opener of the Year (wp-rmp.t), Before the Plummet (tp-ṭ ṭw), Hathor (ḥw.t ḫrw), the two Burnings (rkh) are fixed in the Civil Year in the same order as in the Ebers calendar or in the Tomb of Senenmut. The wp-rmp.t, the two rkh, probably the ḥn.t ḫw.t-ḥrw (Navigation of Hathor), and the nhb-k3w, as the possible predecessors of the ḥw.t-ḥrw and k3-ḥr-k3, the later Khoiak, fall on the first day of a month. This fact could support Gardiner’s thesis that the eponyms fell on the first day of the month following the month it gave its name to, but I concede that this argument is valid in the Illahun material only for the mentioned feasts.

Further on, Luft concluded, “The Ebers calendar is an aborted experiment to substitute the Regnal Year for the Civil Year. The Egyptians did not put into use this totally unsuitable idea.”

**Spalinger Speculating and Soul-searching**

In 1993, Spalinger reiterated the evidence collected by Gardiner concerning feasts held out of their eponymous months in the Greco–Roman calendar. He noted that Gardiner was unable to appreciate “Parker’s hypothesis of lunar determined feasts,” citing in particular the lunar base of the Epiphi feasts. Spalinger continued:

Gardiner and Parker both, in fact, became more than a tad outraged when neither could accept the other’s pronouncements concerning the calendrical reasons for various religious events. In particular, their controversy centred on the names of the months in the (final) Civil Calendar and their relation to key feasts.

In 1993, von Beckerath recounted Gardiner’s examples of 1906 and his assumption that feasts had been shifted out of their eponymous months, an assumption that von Beckerath found impossible to accept. Instead, he agrees with Parker that the explanation lies in the transfer of feasts from the later lunar calendar to the civil calendar.

In 1994, a doubt about how feasts were originally dated enters Spalinger’s discussion. He writes:

By and large without ample textual data of a chronological sort it is impossible to determine the reasons why certain events were set on specific days in the civil calendar.

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33 Ibid., 113.
34 Spalinger, “Chronological Analysis,” 293.
35 Ibid., 292.
37 Ibid., 21.
That they were originally lunar-based goes without saying … it is fair to state that the
dates of virtually all civilly-set feasts are still hard to fathom. Indeed, I doubt that all of
the known festivities can be solved by assuming a day in the lunar calendar equivalent to
the same in the civil calendar, the months remaining the same.38

In 1995, in the context of discussing the origin of civil month-names, Spalinger
returns to the problem of feasts being held out of their eponymous months and
Gardiner’s explanation of his Mesore and Thoth years. Spalinger writes:

Parker rejected Gardiner’s hypothesis of a “Mesore year” with great efficiency although
the latter tried to maintain his earlier position in a very strongly worded presentation in
1955. For Parker, it was necessary to examine the original lunar-based calendrical
system of the Egyptians, the one in which names of the months were always given (e.g.
Ḫnsw) instead of any numerical arrangement (I šmw). From this position it emerged that
no alteration in the civil arrangement ever took place even though the calendrical
discontinuity between a month and its identically-named feast occurring in the following
civil month still remained. Nevertheless, Gardiner persisted in defending his viewpoint
in an [sic] rather extreme fashion. His convenient, if inaccurately-labelled statement, that
his 1906 work produced “statements of fact” rather than hypotheses, may be seen by
many to be a telling example how deeply upset one can become when earlier cherished
hypotheses are demolished.39

Of course, Gardiner did produce “statements of fact” in gathering evidence that
some feasts were dated to the first day of two consecutive months widely separated in
time. His suggestion as to why this came about remains a hypothesis. From the point of
view that the original lunar and later lunar calendars are merely hypotheses of Parker’s—
for which no evidence has been produced—it is not surprising that Gardiner was upset at
the attempted demolition.

Spalinger picks up on Luft’s statement that months fall in the same order in the
Ebers calendar as in the Senenmut tomb ceiling, and uses this to argue that:

No alteration in month names occurred with a hypothetical ‘Mesore Year’ standing side-
by-side with a ‘Thoth Year’, the latter having displaced the former by moving New
Year’s Day ahead by one month. Quite to the contrary, the Egyptian civil year always
began with the wp rnpt feast, itself set on I 3ḫt I. The first month of 3ḫt was originally
designated tḫy but later was called Thoth, in honor of the lunar deity.40

Luft, followed by Spalinger, ignores wp rnpt’s position as the first month in the
Ebers calendar, viewing it as the 12th month. Therefore, they can say the order is the
same as in Senemut’s tomb calendar. But, on this assumption, Spalinger can only
recognize wp rnpt as the feast of I 3ḫt I set in the month of tḫy (how odd is that?) and
assumes that no alteration to month-names and positions ever occurred. By not
attributing wp rnpt to a first month he was able to dispense with Gardiner’s two civil
calendars hypothesis.

Continuing with his theme, Spalinger reiterates the problem of feasts being held
on the first day of the month following the one to which they had given their name
(which he says was from a lunar-based calendar).41 And he says, “Unless we want to

40 Ibid., 20.
41 Ibid.
return to the position of Month XII = earlier month I, month I = earlier month II, and so forth, it is clear that some resolution … must be advocated.”

Spalinger then turns to Ebers again to point out that Parker’s lunar interpretation of the calendar was jettisoned by Luft’s civilly based one. Luft, in company with earlier scholars, thought that the Ebers calendar showed regnal years starting with the accession of Amenhotep I on III šnw 9, but which as we noted, he regarded as an “aborted experiment.” Spalinger agreed with Luft, though he thought the word “aborted” was far too strong. Luft’s evaluation of Ebers as a civilly based calendar led to “much soul-searching” among scholars: Helck, Krauss, Leitz, von Beckerath, and Spalinger himself.

Spalinger sums up his view regarding Ebers:
This calendar has to be seen from a viewpoint that is not solely concerned with Sothis. In other words, the Ebers insert is one of the rare documents that reveals ancient Egyptian intellectual thought trying to grasp a very complicated pattern. With Luft (and later Leitz), I cannot but maintain that a civil interpretation has to be placed upon the whole document and recent attempts to provide a counter-example to this perspective have in my opinion so far failed. (Whether or not one wants to consider the heliacal rising of Sothis, which is listed for all twelve months, as valid is another matter.) Nevertheless, since Ebers has proved to be a major thorn in the side of modern calendrical experts if not chronologists themselves, then it may be best to place this document to the side and to return to the apparently more sober problem of the feasts themselves.

In summing up, Spalinger refers to “the clear-cut difference of ‘minus one month’ when the later civil system is compared to the earlier lunar one,” and “we moderns must take into consideration the ‘décalage’ between the civil month-names and their identically-named feasts … one that is based on the situation at the time that the civil year came into existence.” Thus he follows Parker in thinking that the problem of the months is to be resolved in a transfer of earlier lunar month-names and feasts to a later civil calendar.

Also, in 1995, Spalinger refuted Parker’s idea that the month-lists on the ceiling of Senmut’s tomb, the Ramesseum ceiling and its copy in the Medinet Habu temple, the Karnak water clock from the time of Amenhotep III, and the later Edfu frieze, were lunar. As noted previously, Spalinger concluded that all the month-lists were of a civil nature. The Ebers calendar was not part of this discussion.

Another of Spalinger’s articles of a different nature to the above, though still relevant, was also published in 1995. Summing up this article about the lunar system in festival calendars with reference to new moon days, Spalinger writes:
The official festival calendars reflected a system in which only human sight was utilized; no detailed papyrus rolls of lunar + civil correlation were needed. Hence, it did not matter what lunar month occurred in which a certain feast was to take place; the importance of civil I 3ḫt 1 for the determination of the lunar year–I am now referring to Parker’s hypothetical second lunar calendar–was nil. Likewise, the heliacal rising of Sothis as a benchmark for the new lunar year played no role at all. The presence or absence of a (lunar) intercalary month similarly can be dismissed if this hypothesis is

42 Ibid., 21.
46 Ibid., 22.
47 Ibid., 32.
followed. All … that was necessary for the priests was to see the moon and to find when their lunar date took place within a given civil month.\textsuperscript{49}

This view was reiterated later in 2002,\textsuperscript{50} which we note below.

**Marshall Clagett**

In 1997 Spalinger critiqued a volume by Marshall Clagett published in 1995.\textsuperscript{51} Clagett covered a wide range of Egyptian oriented subjects: calendars, clocks, and astronomy. Concerning the subject of months, Clagett’s view was that “feast days were celebrated in the months following those to which the feast days gave their names.”\textsuperscript{52} This explains for him why \textit{wp nmt} is at the beginning of the Ebers calendar even though later it is a month-name in 12th place.\textsuperscript{53} He viewed all 12 months in the first column of the Ebers calendar as eponymous feast days rather than months.\textsuperscript{54}

Concerning Parker’s description of the old lunar calendar, Clagett writes, “He has given us an account that is only barely possible and is quite speculative in detail and not convincing in its over-all argument.”\textsuperscript{55} Clagett, himself, viewed the first column of Ebers as “an ad hoc correlation of (1) twelve feast days (30 days apart) marking a fixed Sothic year beginning with the Feast of New Year’s Day determined by the heliacal rising of Sirius with (2) the corresponding days of the civil year extending from III Shemu 9 in civil year 9 of Amenhotep I’s reign to II Shemu 9 in civil year 10 of that reign,”\textsuperscript{56} and that it was, “a correlation needed when seasonal dates have to be converted to civil dates.”\textsuperscript{57}

Spalinger’s critique of Clagett’s book appeared in 1997.\textsuperscript{58} Spalinger noted that it was written by an “outsider” and was out of date because Clagett had not mentioned the contributions of scholars virtually since 1989, such as those of Leitz, Wells, Luft, von Beckerath, and Spalinger himself.\textsuperscript{59} But Spalinger concedes this was probably due to the completion date of the manuscript.\textsuperscript{60} Nevertheless, Spalinger writes of Clagett, “His discussion of P. Ebers (page 47 and Document III 2) is close to that of myself and Luft-Leitz.”\textsuperscript{61}

\footnotesize


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 14-15.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 200, similarly 15.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 15.


\textsuperscript{59} Spalinger, “Review of \textit{Ancient Egyptian Science},” 677.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 682.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
Spalinger’s “From Esna to Ebers”

In 1996, Spalinger’s article “From Esna to Ebers” appeared in which he sought to make a connection between the date of 1 $\text{idt}$ attributed to the “Feast of Amun, feast of Re, corresponding to what the ancestors called the Feast of $\text{Wp rnpt}$” in an Esna calendar and IV $\text{šmw}$ 9 in the Ebers calendar.

The date of IV $\text{šmw}$ 9 was also found on another Esna inscription in which the month was Re-Horakhty. Spalinger points out that in the third line of the Ebers calendar the month of $\text{tḫy}$ is in the first column (under $\text{Wp rnpt}$) and is in line with IV $\text{šmw}$ 9 in the second column, and with the ditto marks in the fourth column under the “going up of Sothis.” He concludes, “Esna and Ebers coincide.”

I have dealt with the two Esna passages earlier, the former as an instance of the feast of $\text{Wp rnpt}$ held out of its eponymous month in the Esna calendar, so I will not repeat it here.

However, Spalinger’s view of the Ebers calendar is pertinent to our present discussion.

I consider this very perturbing document to be more valuable as an intellectual aspect of ancient Egyptian calendrics than as a solution to the chronology of the New Kingdom. And if I take for granted that the coverage of this small calendar by Luft, Helck, Leitz, and even by myself, has advanced our interpretation to a new level, this is because grave doubts surrounding its applicability to absolute chronology cannot be dispelled.

In Spalinger’s comprehensive work about feasts his comments on the names of days are worth noting, “The ‘name’ of a day by itself says nothing with regard to what calendar is assumed by the speaker or the writer.”

He gives the example of $\text{3bd}$, the second day of an Egyptian month (by which I understand him to mean lunar month) when set in a 365-day lunar calendar could be second day of that calendar, or if standing alone $\text{3bd}$ could be the second day of a 30-day civil calendar. Spalinger writes, “After all, the names of the days in the Egyptian civil calendar were simply borrowed from the presumed original lunar calendar of an earlier time.”

The point here is that Spalinger acknowledges that the lunar calendar is only presumed, so even he does not have tangible evidence for it. Rather, he points out that day-names could be civil (but from a lunar calendar!), and insists that the Medinet Habu calendar consists of civil—not lunar—months and days.

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63 See Spalinger’s earlier comments on this text in “$\text{Wp rnpt}$ in the Esna Festival Calendar,” Three Studies, 51-56, though he admits that this article is now obsolete (“From Esna to Ebers,” 759 n. 15).
64 Idem, “From Esna to Ebers,” 759-62.
65 Ibid., 761.
66 Ibid., 762.
67 Ibid.
68 See chap. 6, p. 100.
69 Spalinger, “From Esna to Ebers,” 761; similarly, previously, “Notes on,” 22. The “new level” refers to the recognition that the Ebers calendar does not contain a lunar system (761-62).
70 Idem, Private Feast Lists of Ancient Egypt (ÅA 57, 1996) 2.
71 Ibid., 2.
72 Ibid.
Leo Depuydt

Also in 1996 Leo Depuydt’s article “The Function of the Ebers Calendar Concordance” appeared. Based on the old view of Borchardt, followed by Parker, and other scholars referred to above, he assumed the month-names in the Ebers calendar were lunar, and he writes “The original lunar calendar is now accepted by most as it is here.” And further on:

“I am confidently accepting the original lunar calendar. But since its existence is not independently confirmed here, I fully realize that, logically speaking, this existence functions within the confines of this article as a principal assumption or axiom on which the theory proposed above stands or falls.”

Notably missing from Depuydt’s bibliography is Luft’s 1992 article “Remarks of a Philologist on Egyptian Chronology” (discussed above), in which Luft concludes, “The weak position of the lunar calendar in general lessens the possibility of explaining the month-names of the Ebers calendar as lunar ones.” If the first column of the Ebers calendar consists of civil month-names and not lunar month-names, Depuydt’s thesis is demolished—as he himself is aware.

A curious aspect of Depuydt’s theory in 1996 is that he says there are no time intervals stated in the Ebers calendar, just points of time. He writes, “Day 9 dates serve as anchors identifying the name of the lunar month in which they fall in the same line, just as prt-spdt in line 2 serves as the anchor of wp-rnpt in the same line.” And, “The civil Day 9 dates are individual days serving as anchors and heralds. Importantly, the Calendar does not mark time intervals from one Day 9 to another, including a 35 day interval from IV šmw to I 3ḫt” (emphasis his). The dots in the fourth column under the rising of Sothis represent, “not the name or the event of the rising of Sirius, but the function of anchor and herald that this rising exercises in relation to the lunar months listed in the same line and the following line.”

Depuydt’s major work on the nature of the lunar and civil calendars was published in 1997 as Civil Calendar and Lunar Calendar in Ancient Egypt, followed by an article in 1999 entitled, “The Two Problems of the Month Names.” Primarily his book was written to answer the “Brugsch phenomenon”—why “the last month of the Egyptian civil year can be named as if it were the first.” Secondly, he discussed the “Gardiner phenomenon”—why “a feast day occurring on Day 1 of a civil month bears the same name as the preceding month.”

While most Egyptologists see these as being one problem, Depuydt separates them. He writes, “The difference is that the Brugsch phenomenon concerns a transfer or

74 Ibid., 77.
75 Ibid.
76 Luft, “Remarks of a Philologist,” 112. Depuydt refers to other articles by von Beckerath, Krauss, and Leitz, in the same issue of Ä und L (3) as Luft’s article, but he does not refer to Luft’s counter view. Spalinger’s important “Month Representations,” (1995) identifying the month-lists on the Karnak water clock, Ramesseum, Senmut tomb, Edfu frieze ceiling as civil in origin was probably too late for inclusion by Depuydt in his 1996 article.
77 Depuydt, “Function of Ebers Calendar,” 66.
78 Ibid., 66.
79 Ibid., 67.
81 Idem, Civil Calendar and Lunar Calendar in Ancient Egypt (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 77; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 61; similarly “Two Problems,” 113.
82 Idem, Civil Calendar, 63; similarly “Two Problems,” 114.
derivation of month names, whereas the Gardiner phenomenon concerns a transfer of monthly feasts. In instances of the Gardiner phenomenon, a month has the same name as the feast celebrated on Day 1 of the following month.”

Depuydt recognizes three sets of month-names, one of which is the seasonal set with designations such as I 3ḥt, II 3ḥt, etc. Of the other two sets, he calls one the Theophoric Set X, which he attributes to a lunar calendar having months beginning with thy, mnḥt, and so on, and he derives this set from the Ramesseum ceiling, the Edfu temple frieze, and water clocks.

The third set he calls the Theophoric Civil Set, which he attributes to a civil calendar having months beginning with dḥwty, p n jpt, etc. This set of month-names comes from the Cairo papyrus 86637 verso XIV, represented later in Greek–Coptic names. It will be recalled from our earlier discussions that Spalinger argued that all the month-lists, those of the Ebers calendar, Senmut tomb ceiling, Karnak water clock, Ramesseum and Medinet Habu temple ceilings, and the Edfu frieze, were civil in nature. In other words, the Theophoric Set X and the Theophoric Civil Set are one and the same civil calendar, with some names changed over the centuries. However, Depuydt proposes that:

Unambiguous evidence shows that the Egyptians conceived of the civil months and the lunar months in terms of pairs. This pairing found expression in the naming of the months. Civil months and their lunar twins were linked by receiving the same name. Joined to one another by nomenclature, civil calendar and lunar calendar spiraled forward in time like a double helix. This double calendar is a structure with both civil features and lunar features. The lunar component of this composite calendar may be called the civil-based lunar calendar.”

Based on the results of our previous discussions it is hard to conceive what Depuydt found as evidence, let alone “unambiguous evidence” for civil and lunar months spiraling together as in a double helix. Depuydt’s calendars are shown in Table 9.2.

Table 9.2: Depuydt’s Lunar and Civil Calendars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seasonal month-names</th>
<th>Theophoric Set X Month-names = lunar origin</th>
<th>Theophoric Civil Set Month-names = civil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I 3ḥt</td>
<td>thy</td>
<td>dḥwty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II 3ḥt</td>
<td>mnḥt or pth</td>
<td>p n jpt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III 3ḥt</td>
<td>hwt-hr</td>
<td>ḥwt-hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV 3ḥt</td>
<td>k3 hr k3</td>
<td>k3 hr k3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ṭṣrt</td>
<td>if bdt or mm</td>
<td>ṭṣrt bk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II ṭṣrt</td>
<td>ḫḫḫ-wr</td>
<td>ḫḫḫ wr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III ṭṣrt</td>
<td>ḫḫḫ nds</td>
<td>ṭṣrt ḫḫḫ btp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV ṭṣrt</td>
<td>ṭḥwtt</td>
<td>ṭḥwtt ṭḥwtt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I šṃw</td>
<td>ḫḥṣw</td>
<td>ḫḥṣw ṭḥwtt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II šṃw</td>
<td>ḫḥṣw-ḥḥṣ or ḫḥ ḫḥṣw</td>
<td>ḫḥṣw ḫḥṣw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III šṃw</td>
<td>ḫḥṣw ḫḥṣw ḫḥṣw</td>
<td>ḫḥṣw ḫḥṣw ḫḥṣw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV šṃw</td>
<td>ḫḥṣw ḫḥṣw ḫḥṣw ḫḥṣw</td>
<td>ḫḥṣw ḫḥṣw ḫḥṣw ḫḥṣw</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

83 Ibid., 56; similarly 105 (emphasis his).
84 Ibid., “Two Problems,” 111-15. See also, Civil Calendar, 208-9.
85 Ibid., Civil Calendar, 209-10, 238.
86 Ibid., 52, 208; idem,”Two Problems,” 120-22.
90 Ibid., 122.
Depuydt’s Theophoric Set X is the same as Parker’s original lunar calendar except that Parker added *Dhwtyt* at the beginning as the name of the hypothetical intercalary month, and Depuydt’s Theophoric Civil Set is the same as Parker’s civil calendar except that he gives only *mswt r’* as the name of the last month, whereas Parker had *mswt r’*, *Re-hr- 3ḥty*, and *wp rntpt*.91

Depuydt has simply followed Parker’s earlier attribution of month-names to form two separate lists. However, what Parker saw as an original lunar calendar, Depuydt now dates to about 1300 BCE, at which time it was supposedly anchored to the civil calendar allowing the alleged transfer of names, from one to the other, to take place.92 Spalinger, writing in 1998, says, “It does not seem possible that a new lunar calendar appeared at this point in history.”93 He points out that evidence for month-names appears as early as the 18th Dynasty as in the Ebers calendar.94 To these may be added month-names with civil calendar designations in the Hekanakhte letters dating to the 12th Dynasty.95

Armed with his later lunar and civil calendars Depuydt attempts to resolve the “Brugsch phenomenon,” having elected not to interact with any earlier lunar calendar.96 He writes, “The explanation for the Brugsch phenomenon [how a 12th month can be named as if it were the first] will have much to do with the transfer of a set of month-names from a calendar with a straddle month to one without.”97 He defines a straddle month as: “the lunar month that sits astride the yearly marker of a lunisolar calendar. It has properties of both a beginning and an end.”98 Depuydt proposes that this “involves a shift”.99 He writes:

> When the name of the lunar counterpart of civil I 3ḥt was rolled backwards onto civil I 3ḥt, the preceding lunar month name, *wp rntpt* or *mswt r’* was pushed backward, entirely out of civil I 3ḥt, with which it overlapped as a designation of the lunar straddle month … the name *wp rntpt* was pushed backward across these five [epagomenal] days to land squarely on the last or twelfth civil month of the year, IV šmw.

Thus the links with its former signifier, the year’s beginning, were entirely severed … the month *jpt ḥmt* was moved back to civil III šmw. This left civil IV 3ḥt [sic šmw] without a name. The effect is a kind of vacuum into which *wp rntpt* was readily pulled, or sucked as it were … It is this double force, combining pushing and pulling, that tore loose *wp rntpt* from its signifier. The name *wp rntpt* was attached to another signifier, namely civil Month 12. But at the same time it remained in use as a designation of New Year’s Day. This makes for an odd contrast, the Brugsch phenomenon.100

Depuydt’s explanation boggles the mind. What is that force he is talking about? How can names roll backwards from a lunar calendar to a civil calendar?

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91 Parker, *Calendars*, 45 §230 Table 7.
92 Depuydt, *Civil Calendar*, 50-51.
94 Ibid., 245.
96 Depuydt, *Civil Calendar*, 10; similarly p. 138.
97 Ibid., 45.
98 Ibid., 43.
99 Ibid., 66.
100 Ibid., 237; similarly 54-55, 219, 234.
He touches lightly on the “Gardiner phenomenon,” saying, “It concerns the fact that a civil month can have the same name as Day 1 of the civil month following it.” Depuydt accepts Parker’s theory as the most plausible, as a “transfer of feasts from the lunar to the civil calendar.” Regarding Gardiner’s theory that a shift of month-names took place, Depuydt says that if a month had been skipped from the calendar, so that the feast of the months were all put forward into the next month, it could account for the fact of feasts held out of their eponymous months. But, as he points out, there is no known motive for such a “skipping”, and he doesn’t give credibility to Gardiner’s “Re” and “Thoth” clans to explain the phenomenon. Thus, at the end of his book he relies on Parker’s theory.

Depuydt’s 1999 article, “The Two Problems of the Month Names”, reiterates many of the issues already discussed in his Civil Calendar of 1997. Part of the abstract can suffice:

This article attempts to sharpen the distinction between the two problems [Brugsch and Gardiner phenomena] as much as possible. It is suggested that failure to make the distinction has caused much confusion in the debate on Egyptian calendars. The events leading to the two problems of the names are described as the actions and decisions of anonymous calendar-makers. Identifying with these actions and decisions as if they were our own may promote understanding of the difficult problems regarding Egyptian calendars and of why these problems have so much to do with the names of months.

In his article about Sothic chronology, published in 2000, Depuydt admits he is apprehensive of the refutation of Parker’s later lunar calendar by Spalinger, because he equates the latter with his own civil-based lunar calendar. He asks: “But how else can one interpret the three civil-lunar double dates from the reigns of Amasis and Ptolemy VIII Euergetes (Depuydt 1997:161–69)?”

I discussed the “double dates” in chapter 7, and determined that in the three instances both “double dates” in each text are civil month-dates from a civil calendar, and in no way witness to an original lunar calendar with seasons and month-names.

As a final attempt to identify a lunar calendar Depuydt itemises seven facts, which, taken together, allegedly supply evidence of lunar months, which for him infers a lunar calendar. He writes, “A set of lunar months has to begin somewhere … The point of reference for the original lunar calendar is the rising of Sirius.” Having presupposed that there was an original lunar calendar that began with the rising of Sothis, he then cites an equation of prt spdt with wp rnpt as evidence for his lunar calendar. For example, “Second fact: In the Illahun archive, the rising of Sirius (prt spdt) falls generally in late IV prt”, and, “Fourth fact: In the Canopus Decree of 238 B.C., prt spdt is explicitly equated with wp rnpt; other sources point to the same equation,” and
again, “Fifth fact: At Illahun and elsewhere, civil \( w\overline{3}g \) (see section 4) falls on \( I\ 3\ht\ 18 \), that is, at the very beginning of a year or of a set of months.”

It is not easy to see in these and the other four facts why a lunar calendar is inferred. Of themselves there is no evidence that \( prt\ spdt \) with \( wp\ rnpt \) have anything to do with a lunar calendar. Spalinger’s analysis sees them as being associated only in the Late Period with a civil calendar.

We conclude our discussion concerning Depuydt’s views with an article that appeared in 2008. This article seeks to explain the hieroglyph accompanying the name \( wp\ rnpt \) in the first column of the Ebers calendar as a determinative, which marks it as a feast day.

As the only one of 12 names that has this hieroglyph, it requires explanation. Depuydt proposes that the hieroglyph indicates that \( wp\ rnpt \) is the name of a lunar feast day, whereas the other 11 names are those of lunar months.

He notes that if it has been written carelessly or randomly then his explanation has no foundation. If it is a day, then how can the 11 alleged lunar month-names correspond to the 12 civil-month designations? Depuydt reasons that \( prt\ Spdt \) “the going forth of Sothis” marks the beginning of the lunar year, and that its related term, \( wp\ rnpt \), “opener of the year” also means New Year’s Day; thus, “The rising of Sirius presumably owes the designation \( wp\ rnpt \) in large part to its original function as marker of the beginning of the lunar year.”

He theorizes that since the new moon that marks the beginning of the new lunar year always falls after the rising of Sothis, varying between 1 day and 30, this constitutes the lunar month preceding \( th\y \), so that sometimes there will not be enough time at the end of the 11th month to include a 12th month before the first month, \( th\y \), commences. He writes, “In other words, 11 is the constant factor. That explains why only 11 lunar month-names are known and why only 11 names follow the graphic in the first column of the Ebers calendar.” The function of the Ebers calendar was to provide the name of the lunar month corresponding to a date in the civil month in the same line in the second column.

In earlier articles, Depuydt has used the notion of \( wp\ rnpt \) as a lunar month, even as a 12th straddle month, to account for the “Brugsch phenomenon.” Now that \( wp\ rnpt \) in the Ebers calendar is a feast day and not a month, this adds a further complication to his theory—which is not mentioned in the article.

**Rolf Krauss**

In the Proceedings of the SCIEM 2000 EuroConference published in 2003, Rolf Krauss discussed the Ebers calendar in the context of arguing for a low chronology for the Middle and New Kingdoms. He recalled Helck’s proposal in 1986 concerning the

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111 Ibid., 182.
114 Ibid., 117, 123.
115 Ibid., 117, 120, 123, 133.
116 Ibid., 121, 125.
117 Ibid., 127.
118 Ibid., 128.
119 Ibid., 131.
Chapter 9. Exploring the Ebers Calendar

Ebers calendar that Sothis could have risen heliacally on any day between III šmw 9 and IV šmw 8. Krauss saw this as an attempt by Helck to shorten the chronology (having given only 15 regnal years to Horemheb), and do away with the implications of the Ebers date and Parker’s astronomical chronology for the Middle Kingdom (the Illahun dates).\(^\text{121}\)

Krauss stated, “By 1980, however, Egyptologists agreed that the first column did indeed list lunar months, and that in 9 Amenhotep I the first day of the lunar month Wep-renpet coincided with the rising of Sothis on III Shemu 9.”\(^\text{122}\) Krauss assumed that lunar years were known from Illahun and used a lunar year to say that Sothis rose heliacally in the lunar month of wp rnpt, which was the 12th month of the year, the first month being tḫy.\(^\text{123}\) (emphasis added).

Based on this interpretation of the Ebers calendar, and his calculations that led to 1506 as Amenhotep I’s ninth year when Sothis rose heliacally on III šmw 9 (lunar), he calculated back to the Sothic rising in Sesostris III’s seventh year in 1830, leading him to propose the emending of the date of IV prt 16 to IV prt 18.\(^\text{124}\) He wrote, “Either IV Peret 16 was a scribal error or we must refrain from attempting to use the Illahun Sothic date... until new information is available.”\(^\text{125}\)

Thus in 2000 Krauss was still committed to a lunar calendar in the Ebers papyrus, and that Sothis rose heliacally on the first day of a lunar month,\(^\text{126}\) and furthermore continued to assume that Amenhotep’s accession fell on the same day as the Sothic date.\(^\text{127}\) He does not refer to Spalinger’s corpus of literature giving his counter view that the first and second columns of Ebers relate to a civil calendar. Nor does he refer to Ulrich Luft’s article in the same edition of SCIEM 2000 reiterating that there were only lunar feasts and months mentioned in Illahun material, but not lunar years,\(^\text{128}\) the view Luft previously mooted in 1992.\(^\text{129}\) On the other hand, Luft continued to regard the Ebers calendar “as evidence for the failure to establish the regnal year.”\(^\text{130}\)

**Anthony Spalinger in 2002**

In 2002 Spalinger writes again.\(^\text{131}\)

The evidence for a Predynastic lunar calendar is explicit in ‘double-dated’ inscriptions that occur throughout ancient Egyptian history. In particular, correlations of a lunar month-and-day date with a civil month-and-day date confirmed Parker’s theory that a functioning lunar calendar co-existed with the civil calendar.\(^\text{132}\)

He references these “double dates” back to Depuydt’s *Civil Calendar* chapters 9–11. Depuydt used Parker’s “double dates” concerning the 26th and 28th year of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II and the 12th year of Amasis of the 26th Saite Dynasty. I have shown

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\(^{121}\) Ibid., 190.

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 188.

\(^{123}\) Ibid., 189.

\(^{124}\) Ibid., 187, 188, 190.

\(^{125}\) Ibid., 190.

\(^{126}\) Ibid., 189.

\(^{127}\) Ibid.


\(^{130}\) Idem, “Priorities,” 203.


\(^{132}\) Ibid., 241.
earlier that the alleged lunar month-names turned out to be civil months, by which a new
or full moon was dated.

Convinced that the existence of a lunar calendar was a fact, Spalinger writes,
“When the civil calendar was invented, early in the history of Pharaonic Egypt, perhaps
c. 2750 B.C., it was necessary to place lunar-based religious events into a civil setting.
In addition, the newly invented civil months had to be named and placed into a set order;
they were also based upon an original lunar system.”

His statement involves the assumption that there was a lunar calendar and that the
“invention” of a civil calendar had to gain its month-names from a prior lunar calendar.
Yet, in this connection, Spalinger writes, “In [sic] the festival calendars of the New
Kingdom and later the references to lunar events significantly ignore the name of a lunar
month. The common phrase in psdntyw in sw simply indicates that the event fell upon a
new moon within a given civil month. There was no necessity to write down the name of
a lunar month; only the sighting was important.”

The lack of lunar month-names suggests that lunar months did not have names,
which concurs with the lack of evidence of lunar month-names in supposed “double
dates”, and by extension, the lack of evidence for the existence of any lunar calendar.

Concerning new moon festivities, Spalinger writes,
“All that was necessary was to look to the east and to witness the non-occurrence of the
lunar crescent and then begin the festival when the moon reappeared. In other words, no
second lunar calendar was necessary to determine the starting date of these celebrations.
Although their beginning required a lunar event, no separate lunar calendar was required.
So even Parker’s ‘first lunar calendar’ was not necessary.”

So even before a civil calendar was used the Egyptians could hold festivals by
observing the phases of the moon. Since there is no attestation for lunar months having
names, the origin of month-names can be attributed to the civil calendar for which there
is ample evidence for all 12 months (no intercalary month is known!). So why did
Spalinger retain the notion of Parker’s original lunar calendar when there was no need
for it? As noted above, he (mistakenly) thought there was evidence for an original lunar
calendar because of the supposed “double dates,” and because he thought feasts had been
transferred from a lunar to a civil calendar.

But the acceptance of the idea of lunar to civil transfer troubled Spalinger
because of the change of name of the 12th month. He asks:

Why was the last civil month (twelve) changed to Rc-Hr- 3ḥty from the earlier wp rnpt?
After all, the wp (that is the opening) of the year happens on New Year’s Day, I 3ḥt 1.
The name of the first civil month in the year ought to be wp rnpt and not ṭḥy. The Epiphi
festival (in civil month twelve) and the name of civil month eleven can be brought into
discussion. Whatever one’s solution to this difficulty, the changeover of month names
occurred very early. (I do not find the alteration of wp rnpt to Rc-Hr- 3ḥty as significant
as the original position of wp rnpt; i.e., civil month twelve.)

Thus, Spalinger is left with the unresolved problem of the change of name of the
12th month from wp rnpt to Rc-Hr- 3ḥty while at the same time recognizing that wp rnpt

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133 Ibid., 243.
134 Ibid., 245 n. 29.
135 Ibid., 248-49.
137 Idem, “Ancient Egyptian Calendars,” 244.
ought to have been the first month of the year. (Yet he does not recognize *wp rnpt* as the first month in the Ebers calendar.)

Mention must be made of Spalinger’s skepticism concerning the use of lunar phases (new moons) to date Egyptian chronology. He writes,

“In the last fifteen years Bradley Schaefer has demonstrated the inherent weaknesses of lunar dating: no exact Julian date can be derived from the small data set of lunar-civil equations. At the minimum, synchronisms are necessary.”

The “small data set” cited by Spalinger, suggesting a few lunar dates, actually, on investigation swells to about 40 scattered dates, plus about 40 Illahun dates from the consecutive reigns of Sesostris III and his son Amenemhet III, making the total nearer 80–90.

Many festivals, the inductions of priests, and the laying of temple foundations were associated with either the new moon or the full moon. Added to these dates are a number of inscriptions recording the heliacal rising of Sothis. Since lunar and Sothic dates are tied to specific regnal years of various kings throughout the dynastic period, they provide a significant mesh of Egyptian dates and years that can be converted to the Julian calendar, whereby a chronology can be established. This will be demonstrated in forthcoming chapters.

**John Nolan**

John S. Nolan, in a paper published in 2003, sought to tie cattle counts to regnal years in the 5th and 6th Dynasties assuming their timing to an original lunar calendar with an intercalary 13th month. The problem with cattle counts is in the uncertainty of how often they were held. Some texts refer to the *x*th year, such as the “1st occurrence” or the “15th occurrence,” while others of less frequency refer to the “year *after* the *x*th year,” which seems to imply that cattle counts were held every second year. If the notation was, for example, “the year *after* the fourth occurrence,” does this mean the fifth year, or, if biennially, the ninth year?

Nolan proposed that cattle counts were numbered from the beginning of a king’s reign and “over the course of every third civil year (occasionally every other year), the Dhwtyt feast would be celebrated when the rising of Sirius and the start of the next lunar month required the intercalation of an extra month … The celebration of *Dhwtyt* would in some way mean that the ritual cattle count was to be skipped in the following civil year.” Nolan relied heavily on Richard Parker and Leo Depuydt for his information on the supposed original lunar year for which I have found no evidence in preceding discussions. I will clarify the important matter of cattle counts during discussion of the 6th Dynasty.

For many decades until the present, scholars have attempted to find a resolution to the problem of feasts held out of their eponymous months in the Greco–Roman calendar. Due to the importance of establishing the appropriate calendar(s) in reconstructing the Egyptian chronology, and the different interpretations scholars placed on the Ebers calendar, I now offer my own explanation.

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138 Ibid., 246.
140 Ibid., 92.